

Bush Budget Cuts 9/11 Health Funding by 77 Percent

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Admin. Canceled WTV Business Processing Ctr. Because They Said it Lacked Funding, Then Weeks Later Fail to Request Adequate Funds in Budget

Washington, D.C. — Today, Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Reps. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), and Vito Fossella (R-NY) expressed their disappointment after learning that President Bush's Fiscal Year 2009 budget proposal includes a 77% funding cut for 9/11 health care programs, from \$108 million appropriated for FY '08 to \$25 million for FY '09. Last month, NY delegation members sent a letter to President Bush asking him to ensure that 9/11 health clinics, which are expected to need more than \$200 million this year alone, are fully funded in his FY '09 budget. On January 27th, a White House spokesman told the AP that the president's budget "will reflect his continued commitment to World Trade Center workers."

"This dramatic and unwarranted cut flies in the face of common sense, compassion, and just plain fairness," said Schumer. "By again turning a blind eye to the ravaging health effects of the 9/11 attacks and slashing this vital funding, the Administration is reneging on its promise to the thousands of first responders who led the recovery at Ground Zero. I will fight these cuts tooth and nail to ensure these heroes receive the health care they need and clearly deserve."

"With the announcement of his final budget, the President had one last opportunity to demonstrate that he would not forget the sacrifices made by those who responded to 9/11 and are now sick from the toxins released during those attacks. I am disappointed and saddened to see that the President chose not to acknowledge the clear health care needs of these heroes," said Senator Clinton.

"It's shocking that the president would use his final budget to take an axe to 9/11 health care programs," said Maloney. "Just a few weeks ago, the Administration canceled a program for 9/11 responders from around the country because they said it lacked funding, and now they release a budget that doesn't even ask for the money they said they needed. The administration has failed in every single one of its budget proposals to deliver adequate help to the heroes of 9/11. Sadly, it looks like this is yet another problem the president will be leaving to his successor."

"In his final State of the Union, President Bush yet again invoked the memory of 9/11 to score political points. But yet again, his budget request of a paltry \$25 million fundamentally insults the heroes of that day," said Rep. Nadler. "Coupled with its recent decision to kill an important health monitoring and treatment program for Ground Zero workers, this Administration's slashing of key federal funding for 9/11 health programs amounts to nothing less than an absolute betrayal."

"This is the starting for negotiations to secure funding for the unsung heroes of 9/11," said Fossella. "We know the needs are great and the federal government has a responsibility to monitor and treat those who are sick and injured, both today and in the future. We will continue working in a bipartisan manner to help all those who are suffering as a result of 9/11."

Background

The president's FY 2008 budget for the very first time included \$25 million for 9/11 health programs --even though the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimated that the programs would need more than \$200 million to cover their operating costs for that year. At the time the President's FY '08 budget was released, the Office of Management and Budget told Members of Congress that, if needed, additional 9/11 health funding would be added to the FY '08 budget. However, the President made no further funding requests that year.

The New York Congressional delegation fought to exceed the president's FY '08 request and ultimately delivered \$108 million in the regular federal budget for sick and injured 9/11 responders and area residents, workers and students, plus another \$50 million for 9/11 health in an emergency spending bill, for a total of \$158 million.

Weeks before Christmas, the administration suddenly announced that it had abandoned plans to create the World Trade Center Business Processing Center, the first federally-funded national program to provide treatment for sick 9/11 responders and others who reside outside the New York metropolitan area. At the time, the administration claimed that the proposed Business Processing Center wasn't properly funded, but within days of the administration's announcement, Congress appropriated another \$108 million for 9/11 health care.

Last September, Maloney and Nadler and Congressman Vito Fossella (R-NY) introduced H.R. 3543, the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. The bipartisan Maloney-Nadler-Fossella legislation, which is strongly supported by 65 bipartisan cosponsors and the New York State AFL-CIO, would ensure that everyone exposed to the toxins of Ground Zero has a right to be medically monitored and anyone who is sick as a result has a right to treatment; expand care to the whole exposed community, including residents, area workers and students, and to the thousands of people who came from across the country to respond to the 9/11 attacks; provide compensation for economic damages and losses by reopening the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund; and build on the expertise of the Centers of Excellence (currently at the FDNY, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Bellevue Hospital, Queens College, SUNY Stony Brook, and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey), which are providing high-quality health care to thousands of responders.

Last March, Senator Clinton chaired a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on 9/11 health, and is committed to working on a bipartisan basis with her colleagues to develop a long-term solution to the health care needs of those affected by exposure to the toxins released as a result of the 9/11 attacks.

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